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Agriculture in Essex During the Past Fifty Years, as Exemplified by the Records of One Farm, with Special Reference to the Prices of Corn and the Conditions of Labour

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JUNE, 1897.

AGRICULTURE in ESSEX during the past FIFTY YEARS, as EXEMPLIFIED
by the RECORDS of ONE FARM, with special reference to the PRICES
of CORN and the CONDITIONS of LABOUR. By FREDERICK CHARLES
DANVERS.

[Read before the Royal Statistical Society, 16th March, 1897.
The Right Hon. G. SHAW-LEFEVRE, Hon. Vice-President, in the Chair.]

So much has, of recent years, been written and spoken with regard to the depressed state of agriculture, that an apology seems almost due to the Members of the Royal Statistical Society for bringing the subject again under their notice. Several papers on questions relating to agriculture are to be found in the *Journals* of this Society, of the Royal Agricultural Society, in the "Land Agents' Record," and elsewhere, so that there would appear to be few new facts now possible of being advanced. Most of the papers I have examined, however, deal as a rule with the general question of agriculture or of wheat supply, and it has occurred to me that further valuable information might be added to the facts already published by an examination into the records of a single wheat growing farm during the recent periods of agricultural prosperity and depression, and by comparing the results thus obtained with the valuable statistics for the whole kingdom printed annually by the Board of Agriculture.

The materials for such a purpose as this are, however, I expect, rarely to be found except in the case of model farms; but these are not necessarily managed upon the same principles as regards financial results as is the case with farms conducted by independent agriculturists. It is to the latter class the country has to look for its home grown food supplies; and whilst the former class of holdings may—and no doubt do—act as a means of affording much valuable information with regard to certain details of, and improvements in, various branches of agriculture, it is to those who have made farming the business of their lives we must look for carrying those improvements into practical effect.

Anyone desiring to prepare statistics of the working of a single

farm for a long series of years, might certainly spend a considerable time in inquiries, and traverse a large extent of country before finding the necessary materials available for that purpose. If the officers acting for the Board of Agriculture have at times experienced difficulties in obtaining the materials required for the annual agricultural returns—as stated in one of the early reports—owing to the omission by farmers to include certain apparently necessary details in their books, how much greater would be the difficulty in finding all those details, and more besides, accurately recorded for a single farm during a period of upwards of half a century. Circumstances have brought me into communication with the owner of a fairly typical wheat farm, which has been conducted upon strictly commercial principles by himself, and by his father before him, continuously since the year 1843, whose accounts have been kept in the most clear and accurate detail. It occurred to me that a critical analysis of these accounts would afford valuable material for a paper to be read before this Society, and I have to accord my thanks to the present owner of the farm in question, not only for kindly placing his books at my disposal for this purpose, but also for the assistance he has given me by compiling tables from the same, and for otherwise helping me in the preparation of the present paper.

With the view of examining the accounts of this farm in the light of the general condition of the agriculture throughout the country, as shown in the returns and statistics annually published by Government, I purpose in the following remarks to read together the two sets of statistics, viz., those of the farm in question, and those of the whole country, so that the one may throw light upon the other, and show how the continued changing circumstances of the wheat market have been met by corresponding alterations in the management of a wheat farm. Unfortunately, the Agricultural Returns, published by Government, only date from 1866, so that a complete comparison with the accounts of the farm in question is not possible previously to that date, but we can compare prices from the commencement of the farm accounts, as the price of wheat in this country has been included, from a sufficiently early date, in the annual statistics for the United Kingdom.

For statistical purposes, the Board of Agriculture divides England into two divisions, in which the counties are so nearly equal in area, that of the total acreage returned for all England, $52\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. is in the grazing—or western—division, and $47\frac{1}{2}$ in the corn growing—or eastern—division. In the latter division, 43 per cent. of the total acreage was, in 1869, under corn crops. The acreage under wheat in the corn counties was, at that

date, 61 per cent. of the whole wheat area, thus leaving only 39 per cent. to the grazing counties. The following table shows the acreage under wheat in Great Britain since 1866, and the proportion in the grazing and corn divisions respectively :—

TABLE I.

Year.	Great Britain.		Grazing, or Western Division of England.		Corn, or Eastern Division of England.	
	Corn Crop Area.	Wheat Crop Area.	Wheat Area.	Per Cent.	Wheat Area.	Per Cent.
	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.		Acres.	
1866....	9,252,784	3,350,394	—	—	—	—
'67....	9,284,780	3,367,876	—	—	—	—
'68....	9,433,532	3,652,125	1,286,000	—	2,111,000	—
'69....	9,758,037	3,688,357	1,308,000	39·0	2,109,000	61·0
1870....	9,548,041	3,500,543	1,211,747	40·0	2,036,226	60·0
'71....	9,675,261	3,571,894	1,230,958	37·0	2,081,592	63·0
'72....	9,573,551	3,598,957	1,233,217	37·0	2,103,671	63·0
'73....	9,458,928	3,490,380	1,193,054	36·7	2,059,748	63·3
'74....	9,431,480	3,630,300	1,254,348	37·0	2,137,092	63·0
'75....	9,451,650	3,342,481	1,135,192	36·3	1,993,355	63·7
'76....	9,184,769	2,994,957	984,958	34·9	1,887,381	65·1
'77....	9,210,129	3,168,540	1,047,077	35·1	1,940,052	64·9
'78....	9,167,646	3,218,417	1,079,656	35·5	1,961,585	64·5
'79....	8,985,234	2,890,244	959,407	35·3	1,759,585	64·7
1880....	8,875,502	2,909,438	956,869	34·8	1,788,864	65·2
'81....	8,847,976	2,805,809	927,392	35·1	1,713,653	64·9
'82....	8,833,380	3,003,960	997,436	35·3	1,832,055	64·7
'83....	8,618,675	2,613,162	835,482	33·9	1,631,114	66·1
'84....	8,480,730	2,677,038	850,679	33·6	1,680,032	66·4
'85....	8,392,006	2,478,318	787,722	33·5	1,561,583	66·5
'86....	8,260,165	2,285,905	699,233	32·4	1,461,893	67·6
'87....	8,145,894	2,317,324	713,851	32·5	1,483,729	67·5
'88....	8,187,758	2,564,237	804,610	33·3	1,614,055	66·7
'89....	8,075,172	2,449,354	752,640	32·4	1,568,864	67·6
1890....	8,033,133	2,386,336	717,229	31·8	1,538,465	68·2
'91....	7,924,833	2,307,277	680,026	31·0	1,512,367	69·0
'92....	7,808,031	2,219,839	627,009	29·8	1,475,960	70·2
'93....	7,655,739	1,897,524	534,973	29·7	1,263,896	70·3
'94....	7,854,974	1,927,962	553,475	30·3	1,273,151	69·7
'95....	7,400,227	1,417,483	369,965	—	969,841	—
'96....	7,416,690	1,693,957	452,699	—	1,156,556	—

This statement shows a steady and gradual annual falling off, with but few fluctuations in the opposite direction, in the area under wheat cultivation in Great Britain, concurrently with the fall in price of that article. These figures have a greater significance if we take into consideration the fact, stated in the "Report on "Agricultural Returns for 1868," that "in round numbers "240,000 persons are annually added to the resident population "in Great Britain. The additional wheat supply required for

“that number, at an average of 6 bushels per head, amounts to nearly 180,000 quarters, which, at an average English yield of 28 bushels per acre, represents the produce of upwards of 30,000 acres, and a much larger acreage at a lower rate of production.”

In 1895 the area of wheat cultivation in Great Britain was less than half that of 1866, and, on the above quoted basis of production and consumption, it was then only sufficient for the food of a little over $6\frac{1}{4}$ millions of people, or less than one-sixth of the population. In other words, the home production of wheat is probably less than sufficient for two months' consumption.

Making allowance for a somewhat higher rate of increase of population than in 1868 in more recent years, in order to meet the requirements of the country in respect to wheat supply, there should have been an addition of about a million acres under wheat cultivation since that date, whereas there has been an actual falling off to the extent of about $2\frac{1}{4}$ million acres, and this falling off, although it has been actually greater in the corn growing than in the grazing division of the country, has been proportionately greater in the latter, the percentages of decrease being 39·7 and 57 respectively.

The foregoing statement and remarks do not however afford even an approximate idea of the actual deficiency in our wheat area of cultivation. As will be seen from Diagram I, the net import of wheat and wheat flour into England in 1868 amounted to $35\frac{1}{4}$ millions of cwts., and in 1894 the figure stood at close upon 96 millions of cwts., for the production of which, at the rate of 28 bushels per acre, and 504 lbs. the quarter, an additional wheat area of between six and seven millions of acres would be required. In this diagram I have also included a curve showing the annual average prices of wheat between 1845 and 1895, and a third curve showing the areas under wheat cultivation each year during the same period in Great Britain.

The county of Essex, in which the particular farm I am about to refer to is situated, is in the corn division of England. In 1869, according to the agricultural returns for that year, it contained a total area of 1,060,549 acres, of which 428,000 acres, or about 40 per cent., was under corn crops, and of this about 193,000 acres—being 40 per cent. of the corn area, and 18 per cent of the total area—was under wheat. Tables II and III give the areas under corn crops and under wheat respectively of the county of Essex, and of this particular farm, the former table showing the areas on the farm alone before the publication of the *Agricultural Returns*, and the latter those of the county and farm since the commencement of those returns.

DIAGRAM I.

SHOWING NET IMPORTS OF WHEAT AND WHEAT FLOUR INTO GREAT BRITAIN
ANNUAL AVERAGE PRICE OF WHEAT, AND AREAS UNDER WHEAT IN GREAT BRITAIN

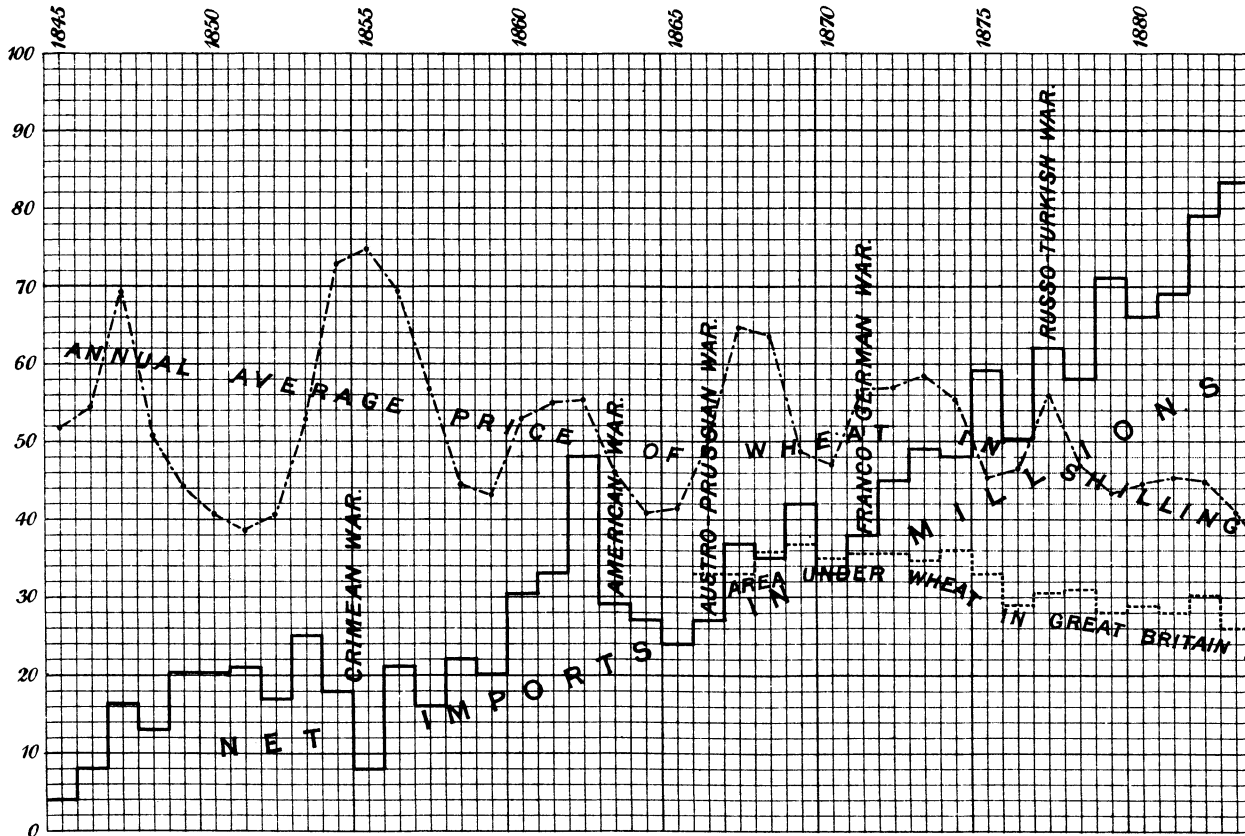


DIAGRAM I.

NET IMPORTS OF WHEAT AND WHEAT FLOUR INTO GREAT BRITAIN;
AVERAGE PRICE OF WHEAT, AND AREAS UNDER WHEAT IN GREAT BRITAIN.

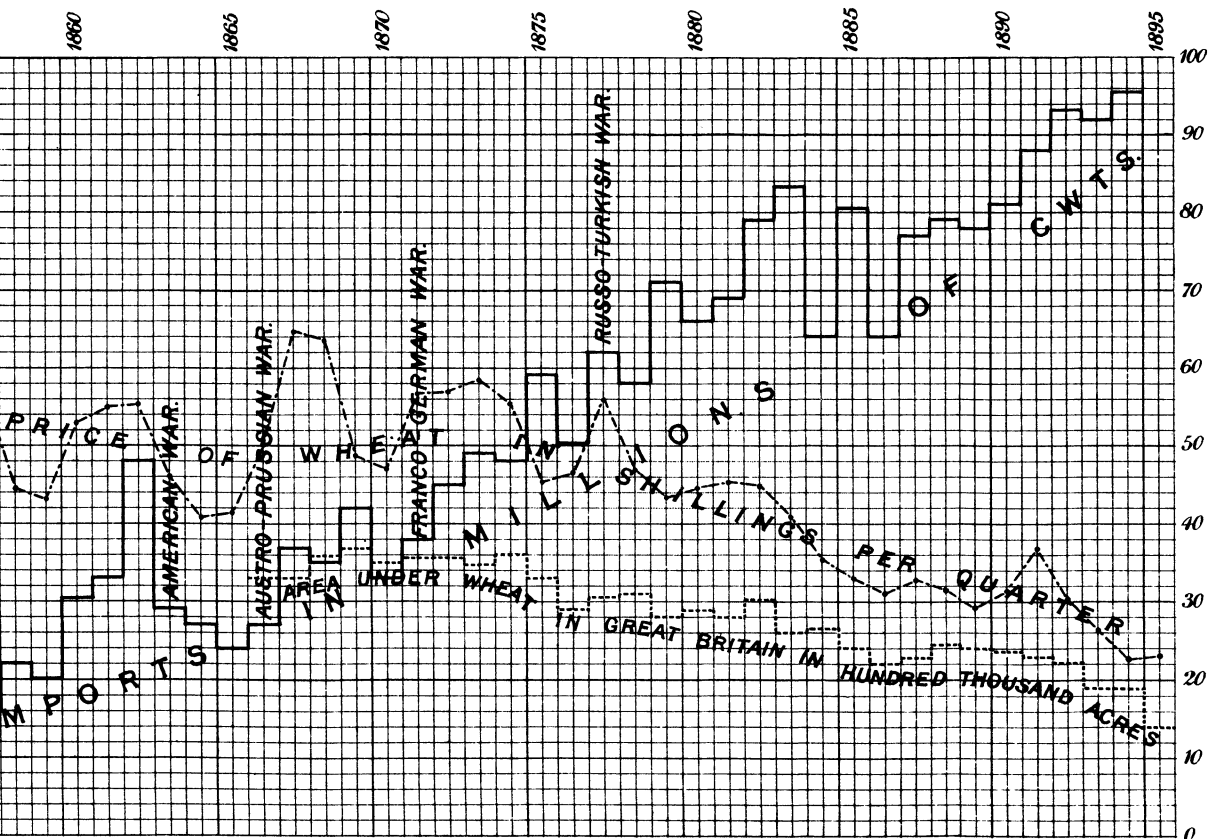


TABLE II.—*Corn and Wheat Areas on the Essex Farm (Total Area of Farm 368 Acres).*

Year.	Corn.	Wheat.	Year.	Corn.	Wheat.	Year.	Corn.	Wheat.
	acres.	acres.		acres.	acres.		acres.	acres.
1843 .	162	109	1852....	173½	71	1859....	167½	55½
'46*	187	69	'53....	146	59	1860....	180	75
'47....	195	99	'54....	161	58	'61....	288	74
'48....	199	94	'55....	154	67	'62....	160	72
'49....	193	87	'56....	152	100	'63....	180	70
1850....	169	95	'57....	182	110	'64....	196	75
'51....	155	81	'58....	138	61	'65....	150	78

* These details are not given in the farm accounts for 1844 and 1845.

TABLE III.—*Corn and Wheat Areas in the County of Essex and on the Essex Farm respectively.*

Year.	County of Essex.		Essex Farm.	
	Corn Area.	Wheat Area.	Corn Area.	Wheat Area.
	acres.	acres.	acres.	acres.
1866	406,206	181,062	149	70
'67	399,408	179,920	193	78
'68	406,424	193,175	158½	72
'69	427,926	192,316	206	79
1870	409,755	183,601	150	67
'71	421,100	193,912	192	73
'72	408,775	197,919	164	72
'73	409,430	190,902	150	66
'74	418,757	200,670	167	74
'75	423,684	185,526	154	64
'76	406,976	168,653	186	69
'77	403,966	174,563	—*	—*
'78	401,494	175,580	196	63
'79	396,439	162,108	151	68
1880	386,399	161,452	159	61
'81	385,366	156,526	174½	58½
'82	379,111	165,521	—*	—*
'83	373,628	156,853	123	50
'84	373,592	161,787	124	58
'85	373,255	145,570	125	62
'86	365,212	138,363	125	62
'87	359,292	140,917	—*	—*
'88	359,186	150,761	200	89
'89	355,693	149,780	—*	—*
1890	353,918	145,256	—*	—*
'91	355,451	144,664	—*	—*
'92	346,614	141,288	—*	—*
'93	330,895	118,187	—*	—*
'94	344,133	120,592	—*	—*
'95	314,348	93,156	122	45

* The necessary details are not given in the farm accounts for these years.

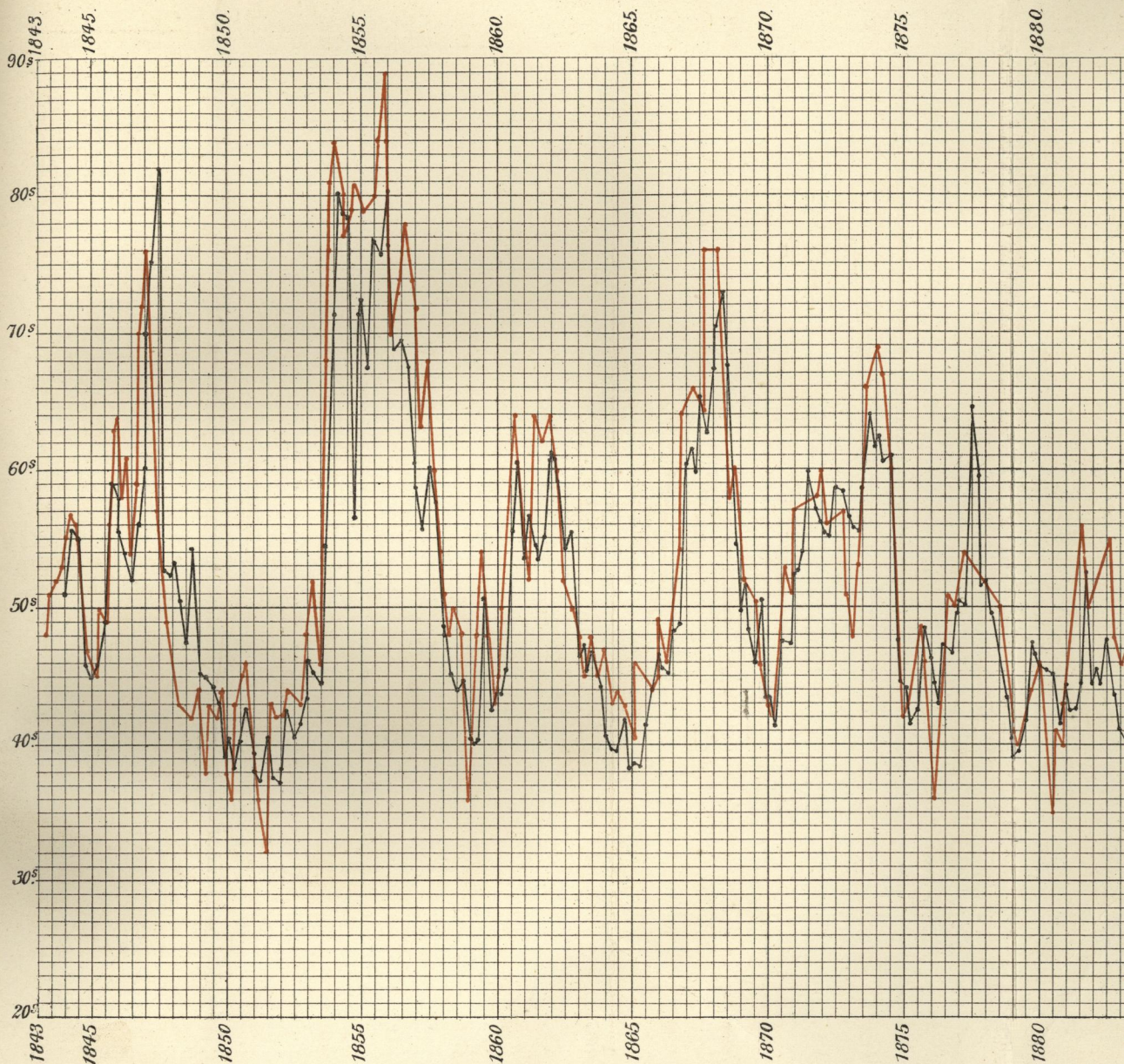
Comparing the figures given in Tables I, II, and III, it appears that while the corn area decreased in Great Britain by 20 per cent. between 1866 and 1895, it fell off in the county of Essex by 23 per cent., and on our farm by 18 per cent. between these dates, and by 25 per cent. between 1843 and 1895. Since 1866 the wheat areas in the same localities have fallen off 57, 48·5, and 35·7 per cent. respectively. This year, however, in consequence of the higher average price of wheat last autumn, and the circumstance of a favourable seed time, the area under wheat on the farm is now 75 acres, or 5 acres more than in 1866.

The Essex farm comprises 368 acres. It is situated about 13 miles from the market town of Colchester, is within 3 miles of a wharf whence water carriage can be obtained to London or any part of the east coast, and has two railway stations within about 5 miles each. In 1843, about 164 acres, or 45 per cent. of the total area was devoted to corn crops, of which 109 acres, or 66 per cent. of the corn crop, and just 30 per cent. of the whole area of the farm was under wheat. This was a record year of wheat growing on this farm until the year 1857, when the area under wheat reached 110 acres. This last named year followed the exceptionally high prices obtained for wheat in the two preceding years.

The repeal of the corn laws in 1846 does not appear to have influenced to any appreciable extent the area sown with wheat on this farm, although that area began gradually to diminish after 1849, when those laws were finally abolished. Indeed, in the year following 1846 the area under wheat was 99 acres, as compared with 69 acres in that year, and, after slight fluctuations, it stood at 95 acres in 1850, the year after the final abolition of those laws. The price of wheat was, however, gradually falling (*vide* Diagram II) and went to below 40s. the quarter in the last named year, whilst some was sold off this farm, in April, 1850, as low as 36s. This reduction in price was no doubt largely due to the increased imports of wheat from abroad, which, in 1849, rose from 13 millions of cwts. in the year before, to over 20 millions of cwts. After this the area under wheat fell gradually to 58 acres in 1854. During the intervening years there was a slight increase in the area under oats, but not sufficient to make up for the falling off of wheat, as the total corn area decreased by 32 acres, or by 16·5 per cent. Probably, however, the deficiency in wheat was principally replaced by root crops, as between 1849 and 1854 the dealings in live stock increased by more than 50 per cent.

In 1854 the outbreak of the Crimean war, coupled with a consequent shrinkage of imports, sent up the price of wheat to 80s., and this was speedily followed by an increase in the area

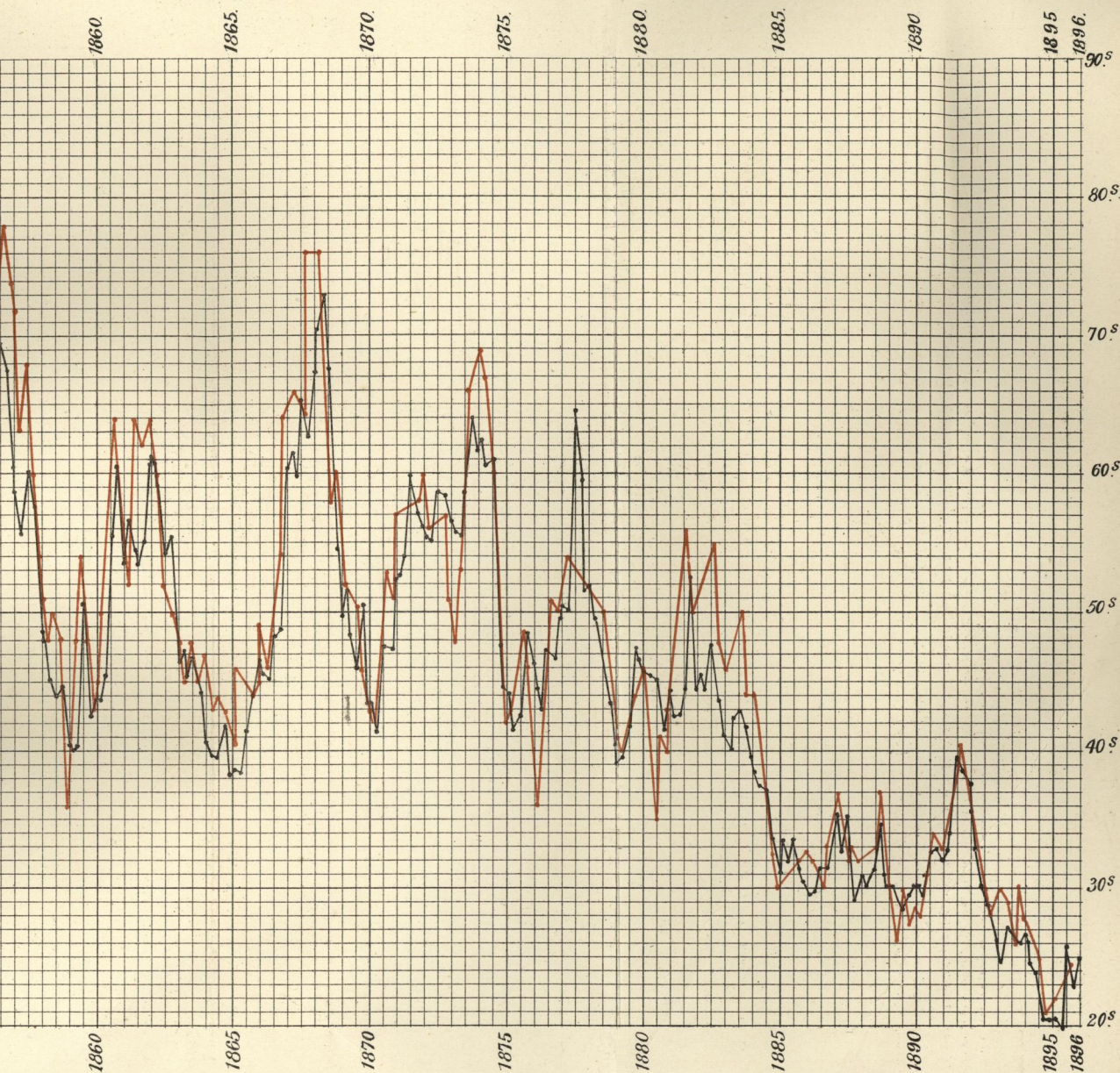
DIAGRAM II.—SHOWING PRICES OF WHEAT FROM 1843 TO 1895 INCLUS



*The Black Line gives the average prices according to the Official Corn Returns
and the Red Line the prices actually obtained on the Essex Farm.*

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GRAM II.—SHOWING PRICES OF WHEAT FROM 1843 TO 1895 INCLUSIVE.



The Black Line gives the average prices according to the Official Corn Returns,
and the Red Line the prices actually obtained on the Essex Farm.

under wheat on the farm in question, which rose to 100 acres in 1856, and to 110 acres in the following year, the latter being the largest area recorded with regard to this farm, and amounted to just 30 per cent. of its total area, as I have already observed in an earlier part of this paper.

In 1858 the price of wheat began again steadily to fall, and in the succeeding year we find only $55\frac{1}{2}$ acres under wheat on our farm, but an increased area under barley, and still larger dealings in live stock. The area under wheat again rose to 75 acres in 1860, and—with the exception of the year 1870, when it fell to 67 acres—remained at between 70 and 80 acres until the year 1872.

Russia began to regain her wheat trade with this country immediately after the termination of the Crimean war; the United States of America made yearly increasing shipments, and British North America began seriously to compete for a share in the trade from 1860; whilst about the year 1875 the British East Indies began a serious rivalry with the farmers of Great Britain for the wheat supply to this country.

Following the fluctuations in the price of wheat, it will be seen from the annexed diagram that it began to rise again about May, 1866, and this upward movement continued for the two following years, after which a rapid fall set in. This rise in price, of course, was followed by an increased breadth of sowings in 1867 and succeeding years, and also by largely increased importations, in which Denmark, Germany, Austria, Canada, and the United States principally shared. Wheat fell again to 57s. 7d. per quarter in August, 1868, and after constant fluctuations it was at 41s. 3d. by February, 1870, but after further movements it again reached to over 60s. in August, 1873, and remained at, or over, that price just twelve months. It is not necessary here to follow in detail all the changes in price that have subsequently occurred, but I would ask your attention to the diagram illustrating these fluctuations for the past fifty years, which seems to show a periodical maximum and minimum at three or four years' intervals until the year 1880, when this regular alternating movement ceased.

Some of these variations are not so easily explained as others. I have already mentioned the Crimean war as a cause of the great rise in prices in 1854-55. The next great rise in 1867 followed on the American Civil war, in consequence of which the wheat importations to this country had fallen off considerably, due principally to reduced exports from the United States. Owing also to the declaration of war in 1866 by Prussia and Italy against Austria, the importation from those countries also fell off considerably.

The next great rise in the price of wheat, in 1871 to 1873, was partially due to the Franco-German war, but also to a succession of short crops throughout Europe. The rise in price in 1877-78 was due principally to the Russo-Turkish war. After that date there has been an almost unbroken downward tendency until the autumn of last year, when a partial revival took place.

These facts, viewed by themselves, lead to the melancholy reflection that foreign wars constitute the brightest hope for the British farmer. It may, however, be observed that peace cannot be disturbed in any civilised country of the world without affecting, to a greater or less degree, the wheat supplies to this country. It will be seen by reference to Diagrams I and II that on the occasion of each great war within the past half century there has been a decided check given to, and a falling off in, the amount of wheat imports to this country, which has been followed in every case by a considerable rise in the price of that grain, and also, as a rule, by an increase in the breadth of land sown in Great Britain.

The prices of wheat at different periods are given in Diagram I, where the black line shows the average prices as given in the Government Statistical Tables, and the red line the actual prices obtained for wheat sold during the same periods on the Essex farm. The close coincidence of these lines is at one and the same time a valuable proof of the extraordinary accuracy of the Board of Trade statistics, and an evidence of the satisfactory price obtained by the Essex farmer for his grain.

The causes which have led in various years to a diminution of the area under wheat are various. Unfavourable seasons at seed time contributed to reduced areas being sown in 1876, 1883, 1886, 1889, and 1895, whereas with an exceptional favourable seed time there has generally been an increase in the areas sown with wheat. The general causes of depressed prices of wheat may be said to be cheap foreign competition; besides this, however, attention has recently been directed to the injurious effects of gambling in fictitious deliveries, or, as it is sometimes referred to, as "wheat options." This practice has recently been prohibited in Canada, under a severe penalty, by Section 201 of the Canada Criminal Law; and an enactment against similar transactions passed in Germany by the Reichstag came into operation on the 1st January of this year. This subject as affecting agriculture is fully dealt with in a pamphlet entitled "The Ruin of the World's Agriculture and Trade," by Dr. G. Rühlmann—which has recently been published in this country—and in a paper on "Wheat Options," lately read at a meeting of the Farmers' Club in London, by Mr. William E. Bear.

We have next to consider the steps taken by farmers to meet the altered conditions of agriculture in consequence of the unprofitable nature of wheat growing in recent years. The former owner of our particular farm used to say that he could not make it pay unless his corn crops brought him in 2,000*l.* a year; and no doubt he held to the old axiom that wheat growing was not profitable unless it could be sold at 40*s.* a quarter, or upwards. Circumstances have, however, changed since that was an article of belief.

Owing principally to the fall in price of wheat, together with that of all other agricultural produce, rents have been greatly reduced, in which also this particular farm has likewise participated. The rent paid for it in 1843 was 620*l.* a year. This was reduced in 1852 to 570*l.*, at which it remained until 1866. In that year it was raised to 575*l.*; in 1867 to 590*l.*, and in 1868 to 640*l.* On the retirement of the former tenant in 1881, there was an unexpired lease of seven years. The farm was then taken over by his son at the last mentioned rent (640*l.* a year), and he paid his father besides 80*l.* a year for the remainder of the lease. In addition to these amounts the tenant had also to pay a tithe rent charge of 120*l.*, thus making a total rental of 840*l.* a year.

On the renewal of the lease in 1888 the rent was reduced to 555*l.*, whilst the tithe rent charge remained the same, thus making the total paid by the tenant 675*l.* per annum. This has since been further reduced; the tithe is now paid by the landlord, and the total rent stands at 422*l.* per annum. Thus the rent of the farm is now almost exactly half what it was to the tenant in 1881, notwithstanding which, however, the accounts show that the profits now realised are scarcely one-half what they were at that date. The introduction of machinery, and cheapening of the means of transit, have also brought about economies in ploughing, reaping, threshing, and delivery, but these advantages have been partially neutralised by a rise in the rates of wages.

In 1886 the breadth under oats was the largest on record since 1866. In one instance it is reported that oats and wheat were sold at the same price, viz., 28*s.* per quarter, and as an acre of oats yields—it was remarked—“one-third more than an acre of wheat, “and costs less to cultivate, while it can be grown on inferior land, “the straw being quite as valuable for cattle, it is hardly surprising “that oats are supplementing wheat in many corn growing “counties.”

That this particular farm has been able to continue growing wheat to the extent it has done, is, no doubt, in a great measure due to the special suitability of the soil for that crop. It has already been remarked that the average English yield of wheat is

at the rate of 28 bushels per acre, but on this particular farm the yield is much higher, and during the last fifty years has produced from 30 to 50 bushels, giving an annual average for the forty-one years for which the returns are complete in this respect of $38\frac{1}{2}$ bushels an acre. One year (1873), which has been included in this average, the yield fell to as low as 27 bushels. The wheat area was then 66 acres. Taking five years' averages, the figures work out very fairly even, and are as follows:— $38\frac{1}{5}$, $34\frac{2}{5}$, $40\frac{1}{5}$, $37\frac{1}{5}$, 40, 41, $38\frac{2}{5}$ and $38\frac{1}{5}$ bushels per acre respectively. The acreage under corn has not practically fallen much on this particular farm, excepting for the last two years, viz., 1894 and 1895. The last year for which a full detailed account of the corn acreage has been kept is 1888, when the total area amounted to 200 acres, of which 89 acres were under wheat, 58 acres under barley, and 53 acres under oats. The average price of wheat in that year—according to the statistical tables—was 31s. 10d., and yet the corn sales amounted to no less than 1,621l., whilst so recently as 1893 they realised 1,431l.

Comparing the relative returns per acre obtained from wheat and barley, and selecting for this purpose the years when wheat was at its periodical highest, or thereabouts, I find the results to have been as follows:—

	Wheat.		Barley.	
	Per acre.		Per acre.	
	£	s. d.	£	s. d.
1843.....	12	7	9	10 10
'54.....	20	3	7	— —
'67.....	14	—	9	— —
'73.....	10	16	12	14 —
'81.....	9	16	9	13 —
'88.....	6	15	9	9 6

As the cost of cultivating an acre of wheat, including ploughing, manure, seed, reaping, &c., is about 5l., it is clear that when that crop produces only 6l. 15s. per acre, out of which rent and taxes and interest on capital have still to be taken before calculating the net return to the farmer, it would be impossible to continue to grow wheat under these conditions, even if the land were occupied rent free.

Oats do not appear to have been much grown on this farm for sale until after 1881, but such as were raised were principally for use on the farm. Taking a few recent years for which the returns are complete, I find that the yield values were as follows:—

	Per Acre.				Per Acre.		
	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
1884	11	15	—	1886	10	5	3
'85	9	5	6	'88	9	1	9

Although, as I have already shown, the area of corn cultivation upon this particular farm has not very materially changed during the period under review, the farm itself has been made to produce more than in the early years of this period, but, in consequence of the general fall in prices, this increased yield has not been of a correspondingly profitable character. To compensate for the fall in the value of corn generally, increased attention has been given to rearing stock. Since about 1882 this increase of stock has been most marked; and whereas the stock sales in the early years of our returns ranged between 1,200*l.* and 2,000*l.* a year, when better prices prevailed than in more recent times, for some years after 1882 these sales ranged between 5,000*l.* and 6,000*l.* per annum; and although they have somewhat diminished since 1889, they still stand much above what they were fifty years ago.

Conditions of Labour.

The parish in which this farm is situated is in the midst of a purely agricultural country, and, like most rural districts, its population has, for a number of years, been gradually on the decrease. Thus, in 1841 it had a population of 1,145, which rose slightly by 1851 to 1,177; in the next ten years there came a falling off, and the population stood in 1861 at 1,038. For the next ten years it remained practically stationary, being 1,047 in 1871. After this a regular and serious decline set in, following the general agricultural depression and very unequal fall in the prices of agricultural produce, which began in 1873, and the population subsequently fell to 915 in 1881, and to 845 in 1891.

Judging from appearances, the inhabitants of this parish are a healthy and vigorous race; a few of the young men find their way to Harwich and enter the Navy, some join the Army at Colchester, and others again drift up to the great metropolis and there find employment in the Police force or at other occupations. For those that remain agriculture is almost the only resource.

With reference to the rate of pay of agricultural labourers in this district—or perhaps, to be more exact, I should say on the particular farm under consideration—it seems to be the practice to fix a comparatively low rate of wages for the men, which rate appears, *prima facie*, to be wholly inadequate for their proper maintenance. A great quantity of work, however, is given them to perform which is paid for by the piece, such as mowing, thatching, hedging and ditching, and fencing, and, in former years, before the introduction of machinery, reaping was also paid for by the acre. Besides this, the ordinary rate of wages is suspended during harvest time, and a lump sum is paid to each

man for the harvest work, which generally lasts about a month, and is calculated at a much higher rate than the usual weekly pay. During this month overtime payments are suspended, but overtime is regularly paid for at other periods of the year and forms another source of extra remuneration. At the commencement of our farm statistics the harvest payment stood at 5*l.* 5*s.* to 5*l.* 10*s.* In 1855 it was raised to 5*l.* 15*s.*, and in the following year to 6*l.* The amount paid seems to have varied between these two last named sums until 1872, when it was raised to 6*l.* 10*s.*; in 1870 it was advanced to 7*l.*, and in 1880 to 8*l.* 10*s.* This high rate seems to have been exceptional, for it shortly dropped again to 7*l.*, at which figure it has continued to the present time. It thus appears that this one item of remuneration has, within the period of our review, been raised from 5*l.* 5*s.* to 7*l.*, or by 33 per cent. On the other hand it used to be the practice to make quarterly payments to the men under the name of "beer money," which was calculated at 1*s.* per week during summer, and at 6*d.* per week during the winter season. This payment has now been discontinued as a separate item, and is included in the general rise of wages.

The farm account books do not show the nominal wages paid to the several labourers, but only the amounts they actually received each week; and, as has been already explained, this often includes special earnings on piece work, so that a man's actual earnings invariably exceed considerably his nominal amount of weekly wage. The actual amount he earns depends, to a great extent, on his individual perseverance and industry.

In the early years of these returns women and children often figure in the accounts; the former being paid at the rate of 6*d.* a day, boys received a similar amount, girls 4*d.* and 5*d.*, and children 3*d.* a day. A household, therefore, when a mother and several children went into the fields, could add considerably to the family purse. At harvest time a number of extra hands have to be taken on, and these are paid for by agreement, and not necessarily at the same rate as the permanent staff. In former years it was not unusual for a man to go about the country at this season with a gang of children, whom he hired for field work to the farmer at a certain price. After about 1866 women, girls, and children appear less frequently in the accounts; and the latter disappear altogether after the passing of the Education Act of 1870, whilst women appear but rarely subsequently to that date.

The number of men and boys permanently employed on the farm does not vary much now from what it was in 1843, but the average is, if anything, fewer than formerly; nevertheless, the wages sheet shows a considerable increase, and the amount paid has risen from an average of 594*l.* per annum for the first

ten years of the period under review, to an average of 73*l.* per annum for the last ten years.

A table of wages for the past fifty years is annexed:—

Table of Wages.

	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
1843	605	19	5	1861	683	16	10	1879.....	799	18	6
'44	642	5	8	'62.....	728	19	7	'80.....	807	9	2
'45	651	14	10	'63.....	614	2	4	'81.....	825	10	—
'46	679	3	2	'64.....	652	1	9	'82.....	797	12	2
'47	678	16	2	'65.....	640	1	7	'83.....	790	13	7
'48	617	12	1	'66.....	712	9	9	'84.....	795	10	9
'49	593	2	7	'67.....	809	8	10	'85.....	723	—	1
'50	495	10	2	'68.....	775	6	11	'86.....	667	8	7
'51	476	15	2	'69.....	970	11	11	'87.....	809	4	3*
'52	512	3	8	'70.....	603	12	6	'88.....	822	5	5*
'53	557	—	2	'71.....	601	15	7	'89.....	873	4	11*
'54	629	9	1	'72.....	658	8	8	'90.....	710	15	9
'55	648	6	3	'73.....	715	19	7	'91.....	701	8	10
'56	742	3	8	'74.....	697	19	11	'92.....	801	16	1
'57	773	13	—	'75.....	650	3	3	'93.....	693	4	1
'58	663	3	9	'76.....	660	4	3	'94.....	705	13	10
'59	556	10	2	'77.....	800	2	5	'95.....	633	7	8
'60	619	2	7	'78.....	779	1	11				

* 110 acres more land occupied during these three years.

Between 1843 and 1849 the wages paid amounted to between 600*l.* and 675*l.* per annum. In the two following years it dropped to 495*l.* and 476*l.* respectively, and stood at 512*l.* in 1852. From this date they rose again rapidly, and amounted to no less than 773*l.* in 1857. After this wages fell again, and in 1871 they stood at 601*l.* There was a general rise in wages in the two following years, and by 1873 they amounted to 715*l.* In 1882 to 1884 they stood at over 700*l.* a year, and in 1892 at 801*l.* This last mentioned year and 1893 were the seasons most unfavourable for agriculture, and wages again came down to about 700*l.* in the last named and following year, whilst in 1895 they were further reduced to 633*l.* The average payments for the first and last ten years show an increase in the wages accounts for the latter period of no less than 137*l.* per annum.

The actual wages paid at present on this farm are as follows:—foreman 16*s.* a week, with a cottage rent free; horsemen 12*s.* a week, also with a free cottage; and ordinary labourers 11*s.* a week each. The two best labourers have also each a cottage rent free (there being four cottages on the farm), but the remainder have to find cottages for themselves out of their wages. Without further explanation it might truly be said that 11*s.* a week is but a scanty rate of pay on which to maintain a wife and family. To this must, however, be added the earnings at harvest time and for piece work.

The former is equivalent to an addition of 1s. 6d. a week to his wages the year round; or, in other words, apart from piece work he in fact earns 12s. 6d. a week as regular pay. In the spring time a labourer hoeing turnips on piece work may earn 3s. a day; and, altogether, an average man will earn 16s. a week taking the year round.

In order to test the accuracy of this statement, I have taken out the wages, week by week, of one of the labourers at present employed, and find that he earned on an average 16s. 5d. a week throughout the year. Only for two weeks did he draw so small a sum as his nominal wage of 11s.; for four weeks he drew 1l. and over each week, the highest amount being 1l. 3s. 4d., and for twenty-two weeks he drew over 12s. 6d., a week in sums varying from 12s. 10d. to 19s. 11d. a week. These earnings were, of course, exclusive of the 7l. for harvest work. This labourer has not one of the farm cottages, and has to rent a cottage at about 4l. a year, after paying which he still would have 14s. 10d. a week to live upon. Of course those who are fortunate enough to have farm cottages free would be able to enjoy about 1s. 6d. a week more for their maintenance.

Besides this, however, those who have farm cottages enjoy fairly good sized gardens also, in which they can raise vegetables enough for the consumption of their families; and, for the most part, they also keep poultry, which no doubt find the greater part of their maintenance in the adjoining farm fields. Since the passing of the Allotments Act in 1887, the condition of these farm labourers has still further improved, and some of them cultivate as much as two acres on their own account, the produce of which they sell when it exceeds the requirements of their own households.

The foreman on this farm has not the same advantage as the labourers of adding to his earnings by extra work, and receiving, as he does, only 16s. a week, with a cottage, he would not appear to enjoy much advantage, from a pecuniary point of view, beyond his harvest pay, which is at the same rate as the labourers. But he receives from his employer in lieu thereof a gratuity of 10l. at Michaelmas each year, which is equivalent to an extra 3s. 10d. a week, which brings up his total earnings to about a guinea a week, and he has also his cottage and garden rent free.

Taking all circumstances into consideration it cannot be said that the agricultural labourers on this particular farm are ill paid. Comparing their rate of earnings with those paid in 1858 and 1875—in each of which years I have taken out actual payments to individual men—they are certainly better off now than in the earlier years. In the former of these years the wages averaged

11s. 4d. per week, and in the latter year they were 15s. 8d. Added to the fact of their higher wage earnings at the present day, it must be remembered that all necessities of life are now cheaper, and every shilling will therefore purchase more than formerly. They now have their children educated free, whereas formerly if these were educated at all it was at the expense of the father, and the men can now obtain allotments to cultivate on their own account in their spare hours. All these must be taken credit for in estimating the material improvements in the condition of the agricultural labourer, in comparing it with what it was in former years. Whether these advantages to the labouring men benefit also the farmers who employ them seems, however, very questionable. It is impossible to read through the evidence taken by the Royal Agricultural Commission without being struck by the repeated testimony of the inefficiency of labourers at the present day compared with what was formerly the case; and one witness, I believe, went so far as to say that it now took three men to do the work formerly performed by two.

I cannot, perhaps, do better in bringing this part of my subject to a conclusion, than quote the following extract from the Report submitted by the Chairman of the Royal Agricultural Commission (Mr. Shaw-Lefevre), Lord Rendel, and Sir Robert Giffen, who were unable to concur in the Second Report which was signed by the majority of the Commission. In referring to the question of labour the above named gentlemen observe as follows: "That
 " the first and proximate cause of the depression has been the
 " great but very unequal fall in prices of agricultural produce,
 " beginning in 1873, cannot be doubted. We do not propose at
 " present to enter upon the causes or other effects of this fall of
 " prices, but we must point out that another cause of the
 " difficulties of the occupiers of land has been the very substantial
 " rise in the money wages of labour, which also commenced about
 " the year 1873. In the greater part of Great Britain this rise
 " of wages has been maintained, and in some parts increased.
 " In the eastern and southern counties there has generally
 " been a fall to a lower range of wages, though not to the level
 " which existed before 1873. When consideration is had of the
 " very great reduction since then in the prices of all the main
 " articles of consumption of labourers, it is certain that, as com-
 " pared with the average profits of farmers, the interest of money,
 " and the rent of land, there has been a great rise in real wages
 " of labour, as measured in what can be obtained for them; and
 " that this rise in the value of wages, and the real cost of labour,
 " has constituted one of the main difficulties of the cultivators of
 " the land; for in this direction only has little adjustment been

“made in harmony with the general fall of prices, otherwise than by economy in the employment of labour.” These observations seem to be fully borne out by the statistics of the Essex farm which I have this evening brought to your notice.

General Conclusions.

It would be a presumption on my part were I to attempt to formulate on my own account any remedy for the present depressed state of agriculture. Amongst the various *nostrums* that have been proposed some greatly favour the construction of extensive systems of light railways; and, in certain localities, there can be no doubt that these would greatly facilitate and cheapen the conveyance of produce to market. But considering, as I am this evening doing, the special circumstances of a particular farm, which, as I have already explained, is conveniently situated in comparative proximity to a market town, and within easy reach of conveyance both by rail and water, it does not seem that any improved or cheaper means of conveyance are specially required in this case beyond what might be met by a still further lowering of freight charges, although, if a railway station were brought nearer it would undoubtedly enable some saving to be made both in labour and in the number of horses required. Numbers of farms in Essex are at present thrown out of cultivation, and others are let at reduced rents in order to attract tenants; an extension of this last named means of relief in the case of the special farm under consideration is too evident a means of solving the present difficulty consequent on reduced prices to need anything more than a mere mention on the present occasion. Next, after a further reduction of rent may be suggested a lowering of the present rate of taxation—imperial and local—on agricultural lands. This has been considered at length by the Royal Commission on Agriculture, and I propose to conclude this paper by a consideration of their several recommendations on this subject.

In approaching the question of the burdens on land, the Commission remark that excessive burdens may undoubtedly throw land out of cultivation, and it appears from the evidence that they have already had this effect in certain parts of the country. In other cases, where the results have not yet been equally disastrous, the imposition of excessive burdens on land must tend to discourage the investment of capital, the application of enterprise, and the employment of labour on land, and thereby operate directly to the detriment of the whole agricultural community, and ultimately to the injury of the community at large.

There seems to be a consensus of opinion amongst the members of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, that the land tax in its

present incidence bears unduly upon property in general; and even in parishes it is instanced that the tax does not necessarily fall equally on the different properties, for although it is required to be collected by an equal rate in the pound, according to the annual value of the property, there is no definition of "annual value" in the Land Tax Acts, and there is a great diversity of practice with regard to the assessments. "Unfortunately," the Commissioners remark, "this tax is exceptionally heavy in the counties which have suffered most from the agricultural depression. Nearly one-fifth of so much of it as was originally charged on lands and tenements fell, and nearly one-fourth of the quotas remaining unredeemed now falls, on the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Lincoln, and Wiltshire. These counties appear to have been hardly used in the original allocation of the quotas, and the very serious depreciation in the value of agricultural land which has taken place in them has greatly intensified the original hardship." Some examples are given of parishes in these counties in which the rate in the pound of the land tax has been increased within the past fifteen years, "presumably," it is stated, "owing to agricultural depression." It will be sufficient here to give instances of this for the county of Essex, with which we are, at present, more particularly concerned; of this county it is stated that in one parish the land tax rose from 1s. 4½d. to 4s.; in another from 1s. 2d. to 2s. 6d., and in a third from 1s. 1d. to 2s. 5d. After giving particulars of other counties, the Commissioners observe that this tax has long ceased to be a tax on means and substance; that it is full of inequalities and anomalies; and that it is a tax operating with peculiar unfairness on the agricultural interest in the parts of the country in which the depression is most severe. In summing up their remarks relating to imperial taxation they conclude by saying, "it is clear that there are inequalities in the imperial taxation falling on different classes of property, and operating to the disadvantage of rateable properties generally as compared with non-rateable, and as between rateable properties themselves, to the disadvantage of agricultural lands, now suffering from unexampled depression. We consider," they add, "that the attention of the Legislature to the whole subject is urgently demanded."

On the Essex farm to which I have referred in this paper, the land tax is little more than nominal, and it now stands at only 4l. annually.

With regard to local taxation on agricultural land there seems to be some divergence of opinion amongst the Commissioners. The burdens imposed by direct local taxation, it is shown, "fall

“exclusively on less than one-half of the property of the country, and on that portion of property which has hitherto contributed the larger share to imperial taxation. On no subject,” they continue, “has a greater concurrence of opinion prevailed on the part of the tenant farmers who have been examined by us, and who have appeared before our assistant Commissioners, than on the injustice of the present system of local taxation, and the necessity for its re-adjustment so far as it affects agricultural lands. It has been represented to us again and again by these witnesses, that the owners and occupiers of agricultural land are specially rated for purposes for which they ought not to be rated; that the capacity of the land to bear the charges now borne by it has been greatly reduced; that agricultural land has to bear an undue share of the local rates in proportion to the present value of its produce; that many of the charges on real property are essentially imperial charges, and ought in fairness to be borne by all classes of property; and that the whole question of local taxation ought to be reopened, and considered in a comprehensive manner, so that all classes may be made to contribute in proportion to their ability to the expenditure on the relief of the poor, education, lunatics, police, administration of justice, and other national charges, now mainly chargeable on the local rates.” The majority of the Commission express an opinion that in order to place agricultural lands in their right position as compared with other rateable properties, it is essential that they should be assessed to all local rates in a reduced proportion of their rateable value; in a separate report, however, signed by three members only, it is cautiously remarked that the existing widespread feeling against local rates ought not to induce us to forego careful inquiry into the actual amount of their burden and as to what has been their course of late years; “nor would it be wise,” they add, “on account of a depression, which it is to be hoped will be temporary, to make permanent changes in the system of rating except upon very sure grounds.”

The assessment of our Essex farm was, in 1881, 508*l.*, and the rates amounted to 65*l.* 2*s.* 3*d.*, or about 2*s.* 6*d.* in the £; at the present time it is assessed to the sum of 298*l.* 2*s.* 6*d.*, and the rates paid last year amounted to 57*l.* 13*s.*, or nearly 4*s.* in the £.

In consequence of the recent report of the Royal Commission, an Act was passed on the 20th July last, which is to come into force after the 31st March, by which occupiers of agricultural land are to be exempted from payment of one-half of certain rates thereon, and the deficiency is to be made good out of the proceeds of the estate duty derived in England from personal property.

The report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, to which I

have now referred, is, however, not their final report, and we must wait patiently for the further results of their consideration of the evidence already collected, which it is hoped may eventuate in practical suggestions for alleviating the present state of depression under which agriculture in Great Britain now suffers.

DISCUSSION on MR. DANVERS'S PAPER.

MR. H. MONCREIFF PAUL said that as the question of wheat statistics had frequently been discussed before this Society, he did not propose to deal with it. With regard, however, to wheat options, wherever a standard of value could be obtained without actual inspection of the produce to be sold, by the help of telegraphic communication, there was pretty sure to be "c.i.f." business or a system of sales before delivery and even before the article had been produced. It was impossible therefore to stop the option system, or *marché à terme*, by legislation, either in this country, France, or Germany. He thought that in order to ascertain the profit or loss on any farm, especially in Essex, the other products besides corn ought to be included. Essex was a county sufficiently near to the metropolis to warrant the development of dairy farming, where there existed a suitable outlet for the sale of milk and butter. In proof of this he might add that some years ago, when no tenants could be found for certain Essex farms, some Ayrshire farmers migrated to that county, and had done a good business there, having disposed of their dairy produce to advantage in London. More attention ought to be given to such produce in this country. Denmark sent over butter in large quantities to the northern provincial markets, and the Danes were able to acquire large profits simply by the application of scientific principles. What the Ayrshire men had done in Essex could be done to a much larger extent if the same scientific principles were applied to this country as a whole. To give a practical illustration, the average yield of milk per cow for the United Kingdom was computed to be 450 gallons, but in ten Scotch counties it was as high as 600 gallons, and on some experimental farms, such as that of Sir John Lawes, the return was as much as 850 gallons. Increases of this kind, obtained by careful farming, would make a vast difference, and in the development of the stock and dairy produce industry on scientific principles throughout Great Britain lay the secret of success to her agricultural classes.

Mr. R. H. REW thought that comparatively few people had as yet mastered the difficult question of wheat options, but it seemed to him that it had reached a stage when an authoritative inquiry was desirable, whereby some amount of misconception might at

any rate be removed. Reference had been made to legislation on this subject in Canada and Germany, and though it was impossible to estimate at present what was the result of the law which had just come into operation in Germany, he should be glad if Mr. Bear could tell them what had been the effect of the law on the price of wheat in Canada. He would like to know on what authority Mr. Moncrieff Paul stated that a much higher quantity of milk per cow was obtained on the average by Scotch farmers than by English?

Mr. W. E. BEAR did not imagine that the law on "options" in Canada could have had any influence on price, because the option system had never existed there. The law was passed to prevent it, and even if it had existed its suppression could not have affected prices to any great extent, because the Canadian markets had not so much influence on the prices of the world as those of the United States. Up to 1896 he considered there had been three causes for the fall in the price of wheat:—

1. The appreciation of gold.
2. A series of extraordinarily abundant harvests.
3. The option or future system.

The appreciation of gold did not account for wheat having fallen more than anything else. Then, although for a few years there had been extra crops, there were many years in the past when there had been more of a glut than during the last ten years, and yet the price had been 50 per cent. higher than it was lately. The option system had been gradually increasing since 1882, and the option markets of New York and Chicago now governed the price of wheat throughout the world. It was admitted that about ninety times the quantity of all the real wheat in those markets was sold as *paper* wheat, as the Americans called it, or *wind* wheat, which really had no existence at all. These option prices were all quoted and ruled the market; in fact the prices of spot wheat followed the option price. Last year up to the autumn prices fell, notwithstanding the fact that the wheat crop of 1895 was at least 5 million quarters less than a year's consumption, as was proved by the fact that the world's stocks, which were pretty accurately gauged and reported, were about $5\frac{1}{4}$ million quarters less at the end of the cereal year 1895-96 than at the beginning. In spite of that fact, and although stocks of wheat, as shown by the visible supplies in Europe and America, were decreasing rapidly, prices kept falling from the middle of February to the beginning of September. He attributed that entirely to the system of market wrecking. Then in the autumn came the estimates of the Hungarian Minister of Agriculture and other authorities, to the effect that the world's wheat crop of 1896 was about 20 million quarters less than that of 1895, which itself had been 5 million quarters short. That scared the speculators, and sent the prices up for a few weeks. But this rise did not last long; the highest price was reached at the end of November, and from that time down to last week it had been steadily falling, with a few fluctua-

tions, and last week wheat was 5s. 5d. a quarter less than in November. Since the last week in November every item of intelligence relating to the wheat crop until the beginning of March, when the final estimate of the Russian Minister came out, had been such as to show that the yield of the world was smaller than had been anticipated in the autumn; but in spite of all that, prices fell. All the facts as to a short crop in Australia, India, Argentina, and Uruguay became known subsequently; but apparently they had not the slightest effect upon the market. If the market had been ruled by supply and demand in the old way, the average price now would probably be at least 40s. instead of 27s. 11d. The bears manipulated the whole thing, there were hardly any bulls inside the markets. The bears in the United States began their operations as soon as the wheat was harvested, in fact, before it was got in. The elevator men bought the farmers' wheat in August on the basis of the May options. Thus the farmers' crop was sold at the price fixed by a gambling transaction six or eight months ahead. They kept on selling distant options at a lower price than near options, and still more below the price of spot wheat. Very often there was a difference of 15 c. a bushel between the price of spot wheat and options for May or July. Price differences were settled every day, and for every fall the bears took the difference. When they sold distant options at a low price, it lowered market prices, and so they kept on lowering prices until they forced the bulls to liquidate, and thus extinguished the contracts. Not one in twenty of these transactions ever came to its proper termination, and the great majority of options sold for May were liquidated long before that date arrived. By forcing liquidation, the bears got all the profits, and the bulls were losers. Even if prices happened to rise when the month came, the bears would not lose, because they had already settled the transactions. There were occasions, like last autumn, when the bears had to pay pretty sharply; but in the long run, and so long as there was enough wheat to go round, the game was a safe one. Occasionally a reaction was wanted, as it enabled them to sell at as high a price as possible in order to work all the better for a fall. Of course there was sometimes a "corner" in wheat; but it was rarely managed successfully.

With regard to the question of dairy farming, English farmers were not satisfied with 3½d. a gallon for their milk, which was what the Danes got. Dairy farming had improved wonderfully during the last ten or twelve years, partly by the energetic efforts of the British Dairy Farmers' Association, and partly by the excellent schools established by the Bath and West of England Society, and County Councils. Creameries had also been established in Ireland, and had proved successful; but the average price given for milk there was only 3½d., or rather 3·56d. a gallon, which would hardly satisfy English farmers, except in out-of-the-way districts where they had to sell their butter very cheaply.

Mr. CLARE SEWELL READ said that his remarks would be mainly in support of the paper with regard to prices. He had just been

looking at his accounts for the year 1875, showing the results of the harvest of 1874, and he saw that, speaking in round numbers, his wheat fetched 50s., barley 40s., and oats 30s. per quarter. Last year he found the prices realised were, wheat 24s., barley 25s., and oats 14s. Going back to 1875 again he found the value of beef was 9d. per lb., pork 7d., and wool 40s. a tod. Last year beef was 6d. per lb., pork 4d., and wool 21s. a tod. That showed that as far as wheat cultivation was concerned, not only in the county of Essex but throughout all England, arable farming must be a mistake and would end in absolute bankruptcy. Although in this case, as they had heard, there had been a considerable amount of money turned over in the shape of live stock, showing a large increase in the sheep and cattle kept, the profits of a grazier, who was generally speaking an arable farmer too, could not have been very great, in consequence of the very high value of store stock as compared with the price of meat. He did not think there had been a decrease in the value of store stock of more than 1l. or 30s. since twenty years ago, when he received 9d. per lb. for beef, whereas now the price was only 6d., so that a grazier could not expect to have any profit at all, although the oilcake and other artificial foods were much cheaper now than they were then. With regard to the agricultural labourer, he was glad to recall the fact that when he could get employment (that was the great question with him now) he was very much better off than he was twenty years ago. Going back fifty years, he could remember the time when the usual rate of wage of the day labourer was a bushel of wheat and 3s. a week. The bushel of wheat might be taken at 7s., and the 3s. represented certain fixed payments which he must make, such as rent, clothes, and the like. If he were paid at the same rate now, he would get say 6s. 6d. in all. The things he had to buy, such as groceries, &c., were almost all of them very materially cheaper now than they were then. There was not perhaps much difference in the price of meat, but then he rarely got it on week days, except perhaps a piece of bacon. He was delighted to find that the labourer had not fallen on the adverse times which had certainly overtaken the occupier and owner of land, but he (Mr. Read) should be still more glad if he would rather improve the quality and quantity of the labour he gave. He did not hesitate to say, from his own experience, that in these days an agricultural labourer's idea of what was due to his employer was this: to get the largest possible amount of wage for the least possible and worst work, and as long as that went on the employers could not expect to decrease their outlay for labour. With regard to harvest wages, he paid as much per acre as his father did fifty years ago, who had no reaping machines, and nothing even in the shape of a rake worked by a horse. Now they had all kinds of expensive machinery, but though the hard work fell chiefly on the horses, the wages paid for harvesting corn per acre were just about the same now as then. The labourer was better paid, but he certainly did not do the same amount of work.

Mr. J. C. PILLMAN (London Corn Exchange) thought that they were that evening looking at the question entirely from the standpoint of the farmer, whose prosperity depended on the prices he got for his produce. The depression in agriculture was not caused by any reduction in consumption, but by the severe depreciation in the value of the produce. The question was how was it caused, by natural conditions or artificial ones? The corn laws were repealed because they caused an artificial rise in the price of wheat, and they were abolished in the interest of the consumer. The question now raised was, was there not an equally artificial system existing to-day which caused a depreciation in value to the detriment of the producer? It had been stated that this was due to over production, and it had also been said that the very extensive growth of wheat in silver-using countries was the cause of the present unprecedently low values. But it must be remembered that agricultural depression existed not only in England, but throughout the whole agricultural world. In the Western States of America, through depreciation in value, the farmer was being heavily mortgaged, and was in a more unsatisfactory condition than his brethren in England, because he depended almost entirely on the production of grain, whereas British farmers could turn their land in many cases to other account. The theory that over production was the cause of depreciation in values, might be shown at the present time to be fallacious. The price of wheat to-day was not a paying price to the producer, yet the silver-using countries had grown practically no wheat, and the wheat crop all over the world was last year below the average. Yet in spite of these exceptional circumstances, making it a year of actual shortage, the price of wheat had not risen to the cost of production. Did not that show pretty clearly that it was not a question of over-production; that it was not due to natural causes, but that there had grown up in the commercial world an artificial system which was depreciating the value of the produce, just as years ago we had an artificial system in this country which had the effect of raising the price against the consumer? Whoever put his capital into the soil or into manufacturing industries, was entitled to have free and fair conditions for trading; but the system which had grown up, which enabled people to sell what did not exist, and which could only be sold through this artificial system, did not help at all in the natural distribution of the produce of the world. It was really in the interest of freedom of trade that any illegitimate system of trading should be abolished. The Marquis of Salisbury in a letter to Mr. Jasper More some years ago, said that it was very difficult to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate transactions upon this class of market; but he would say in reply to that, and to a similar remark from Sir Courtenay Boyle, that you cannot have a legitimate transaction on an illegitimate market. He was quite convinced that the only way in which the farmer could secure a fair price for his wheat, was to abolish the artificial system which was always depreciating his property. A previous speaker seemed to think an option was the natural outcome of what he termed "cost, freight, and insurance business." There were gentle-

men present, well qualified to speak, who would tell him that the option market had nothing to do with "c.i.f." business. The difference between the two was this. With the "c.i.f.," or the legitimate speculation such as existed in the "seventies," when the price of wheat was over 40s., the business was confined entirely to dealing in the actual article, and was limited by the quantity of wheat in the world, and naturally then speculation took the form of importing the actual stuff on "c.i.f." terms. This new system was one under which people sold enormous quantities of paper wheat which had no existence, and created monopolies by which agriculture all the world over was in the most depressed condition. Until this artificial system called "options" was abolished, he was convinced there could be no hope for agriculture, as prices of wheat would continue at unnaturally low levels, to the detriment of millions of producers, and in spite of the sound statistical position of trade warranting, as a normal condition, a level of values at or near cost of production.

MR. W. C. LITTLE, as a practical farmer, desired to thank Mr. Danvers for this paper. He need not point out to members of the Society how extremely dangerous it was to found conclusions on such a very small basis as the experience of one farm, knowing as he did that on two farms similarly situated and equally well farmed, the results in particular years would vary enormously. Nevertheless, taken as these figures were for a long series of years, such a contribution was most valuable, and he was not at all disposed to dispute the general conclusions which might be derived from the paper. If, as in this case, the gross rent had only been reduced by 50 per cent. and the profit by the same amount, this farm was a favourable instance, compared to many in the eastern counties. There were one or two facts which were illustrated by the paper to which he should like to call attention, and first he would refer to the statistics given with regard to wages. The distinction was clearly drawn between wages and earnings, and having had to conduct an inquiry under the Labour Commission into this particular subject, he had appreciated for a long time the great distinction between the nominal rate of weekly wages, which many people considered the measure of what the labourer received, and the earnings which he could possibly get. He had stated in his report to the Labour Commission that in countries of low wages the earnings were in some cases more than 40 per cent. above the nominal wages, and in this case it appeared that an ordinary labourer with a nominal wage of 11s. was able to earn, if a good workman, 16s. 4d. a week. Of course it was not to be supposed that all earned that, but it was within the capacity of an able-bodied labourer whose wages were 11s., to earn 50 per cent. more. In passing, he would remark that the Minority Report of the Royal Commission referred to in the paper stated rather too broadly, as was shown by this paper, that the rise in wages commenced in 1873. It would be found that on this particular farm the highest amount paid was in 1857, and his own experience certainly would lead him to believe that there was for a period

during the Crimean War a rate of wages prevailing fully equal to that of 1872, and in 1846 or 1847 he believed the rate was equally high. It was quite true that a more general and more prolonged rise took place in 1873, or perhaps a little before that. Turning to another point, they were told that the sales of live stock on this farm had increased from 2,000*l.* to 6,000*l.*, or from 1,500*l.* to 5,000*l.*, but he should like to know what the purchases were as against that. It was a very common mistake in dealing with farm accounts to treat the whole sales of live stock as produce of the farm. On one farm, say a wold farm or a down farm, where there were no purchases of live stock, and where it was all bred on the farm, the whole expenditure might be 100*l.* for rams, bulls, or stallions, that method was right, but where a man went into rearing stock and feeding stock not bred on the farm there was a large outlay for purchases. The only other subject he would refer to was that of rates. It was thought by some that rates had been reduced to the same extent as the fall in the value of the land or the tenant's profit, but this case, though of course it was only an isolated instance, bore out what he had for a long time contended, that measuring the rates by the gross profits, even though there had been a considerable diminution, they were still greater in proportion to the sum divisible between the landlord and tenant, or to what would be obtained by a man farming his own land. It appeared that, roughly speaking, the profits of the landlord and tenant had each been decreased by 50 per cent., whilst the rent actually obtained by the landlord was subject to a still further reduction, but in the face of that reduction of 50 per cent. the reduction in rates had been only 12 per cent. Thus a much larger proportion of the net produce was absorbed, although a smaller amount was actually taken.

The CHAIRMAN (The Right Hon. G. Shaw-Lefevre), in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Danvers, said his method of taking a single farm and comparing its conditions with fifty years ago was an extremely good one, but he left off the comparison at the point of greatest interest, for he did not give the amount of profit made by the farmer. Mr. Danvers had told him that the farmer had refused to show him his accounts, but said that there had been profits every year, and that comparing the present time with some years ago, the profits had been reduced one half. They would have liked to know what the profits were fifteen or twenty years ago as compared with the present time, for they would have thrown much light on the position. He inferred the profits in the past had been good, because it was stated that the son took over an unexpired term of seven years from his father, and paid him 80*l.* a year in addition to the rent, and that was in 1881, when the agricultural depression had already begun, and prices had begun seriously to fall; and even now, though the profits had been reduced by one half, they were not so low as to prevent the tenant remaining at a rent of nearly 1*l.* per acre. The farm he should not have considered very favourably situated, being five miles from a railway station and ten miles from Colchester; but

the land appeared to be good, because the average production was 38 bushels to the acre, as against the average for the whole country of 28 bushels. It would be very desirable to know how the occupier had been able to meet the difficulties of falling prices, by change of cultivation or otherwise. It was obvious that an adjustment might be made in several directions. The rent might be reduced, and in this case it apparently had been reduced by one half. Then the wages might also be reduced, either in the amount given to the labourer, or in the aggregate amount expended. He gathered from the figures that that there had been no reduction in the actual wages to the individual labourers; indeed, they had been considerably increased. As Mr. Read had well said, the individual labourers on that farm must be in a much improved condition compared to fifteen or twenty years ago. But on the other hand there had been some reduction in the aggregate wages paid, probably in consequence of the smaller proportion of land under arable cultivation; but without the further information as to profit, it was extremely difficult to form an opinion from this one case how a farmer might hope to secure for himself a reasonable and fair profit. Looked at generally, this case showed that one must not judge the condition of the whole county of Essex from the south-eastern part of it, as described by Mr. Pringle in his very interesting report. No doubt that part of the county had suffered very greatly by the recent depression in agriculture, and a great deal of land had been reduced in value from 30s. to 5s. or 10s. an acre. But that was not the condition of other parts of Essex, as was shown not only by the present case, but also by the evidence of a farmer near Chelmsford before the Agricultural Commission, which led to much the same conclusions as this paper. That farm was one of 1,600 acres, the soil was a porous and chalky clay, cultivated mainly as arable land; and by close application and economy the tenant had made some profit even during the last few years, and many other farmers in the district were doing the same as himself. As much labour as as ever was employed on the land. He had never paid less than 1*l.* an acre rent until 1895, when it was reduced to 17*s.* He attached the greatest importance to freedom of cropping and freedom of sale, and he sold straw and clover hay on the London market. He did not rigidly adhere to the four-course system, but turned his attention a good deal to feeding bullocks. He also sold 185*l.* worth of poultry in the year, and considered they paid better than anything else. This all tended to show that by altering the system of cultivation, not adhering to the four-course system, and by paying more attention to the smaller items of the farm, such as poultry, much might be done to meet the difficulties caused by the fall in prices. They would also have been glad of further information as to the effect of the recent rise of prices which had undoubtedly taken place during the last few months in almost all agricultural products. He had taken the prices given in that week's "*Economist*," and compared them with the prices of last September and of March, 1895, which was about the lowest point, and found them to be as follows:—Wheat was now 40 per cent.

higher than two years ago, and 20 per cent. higher than in September last; barley was 15 per cent. higher than two years ago; oats had increased considerably in value; prime beef was 5 per cent. more than in March, 1895, and 8 per cent. more than in September, 1896; mutton 20 per cent. and 15 per cent. more than in March, 1895, and September, 1896 respectively. In all these articles there had been a considerable rise within the last few months, and an even greater rise as compared with two years ago, and he should be glad to know how far this had altered the conditions of the farming accounts such as those which Mr. Danvers had laid before them. He was unable to agree with Mr. Bear and other speakers that the subject of options had anything to do with the fall of prices. He wished he could think so; for he had no sympathy with such gambling transactions, and it would not be difficult to put a stop to them if they had the effect Mr. Bear believed. But for every seller there must be a buyer, and it seemed to him that this system was as likely to raise prices as to lower them; but in fact he did not believe it did either one or the other. No doubt the main cause of agricultural depression had been the fall of prices, and many explanations had been given of that. Some people thought it was due to the appreciation of gold, but he believed it was mainly due to the great increase of production and to the great reduction in the cost of transit. What they had to look forward to in the future as to prices no one could predict; who for instance could have predicted in July last the great rise in price of wheat which occurred in the autumn? All they could hope was that the present rise which began in September last might be maintained. The rise of wages which undoubtedly began in 1873 and 1875 throughout the greater part of the country, had been maintained, and in some parts even increased. He admitted that in some parts of the east of England there had been a fall, but taking the whole country the position of labourers was unquestionably better than it used to be, largely owing to the fall in prices of all the commodities they consumed, and there was every indication that the improvement would be maintained. They must appreciate the fact that the agricultural interest had to some extent gained by the reduction in the price of artificial manures and feeding stuffs, and he would conclude by expressing the hope that farmers with the adjustments already made and those to be made, if necessary, might still be able to secure that fair profit to which they were legitimately entitled.
